Module 5

Monitoring and reporting results for the SDGs

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The Sustainable Development Goals and their monitoring

At the global level, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets of the new agenda will be monitored and reviewed using a set of **global indicators**.

The global indicator framework for Sustainable Development Goals was developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and agreed upon at the 48th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission held in March 2017.

Governments will also develop their own **national indicators** to assist in monitoring progress made on the goals and targets.

Chief statisticians from Member States are working on the identification of the targets with the aim to have 2 indicators for each target. There will be approximately 300 indicators for all the targets.

Indicators for measuring SDGs in cities

The need to monitor SDG progress on local level goes hand in hand with efforts to localise the global goals and is often one of the main challenges faced by local administrations, either due to lack of data or relevant skills to pursue this activity.

Several international and national institutions are working to support cities with datasets and indicator methodologies for monitoring progress on the SDGs at local level. In the Global Goals for Cities (GG4C) network, we used a few selected frameworks as a basis for identifying a core set of SDG indicators to start from, referenced in this Module.

Voluntary Local Reviews

The 2030 Agenda encourages national governments to conduct “Voluntary National Reviews” (VNRs). VNRs are presented at the yearly high-level political forum (HLPF), under the auspices of United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) - mimicking the name of the national reviews – are not formally part of the UN system but started as a “bottom-up” innovation by cities (e.g. New York, Helsinki and Bristol). VLRs thus provide a means to showcase progress on the SDGs internationally and can be a tool to mobilise support and engagement around the SDGs at local level as well.

The importance of monitoring results using indicators

We need to monitor results in order to be able to **move from a current status**, reach another condition, intentionally an improved one, and be able **to communicate** the effort, in a transparent way.

Improvement will come eventually, through **well-informed and justified decisions** on actions. The challenge is to decide on the level of the improvement pursued, realistically and objectively, enabling to decide on realistic actions, relevant to an adopted strategy. For example:

- Being in 2024 today, we are targeting **10% increase** of the green density per capita in our city until 2030. We will achieve this through the construction of one metropolitan park of **80 hectares**, accessible to all.

If current status, targets and the actions to achieve them are set, then reporting can be an easy procedure. **Reporting** is critical to be able to communicate, in a transparent way and build trust.

Indicators' science is the pathway that leads to monitoring and ability to report the effort taken in order to move from a current status to another condition, intentionally a better one.

Fear of failing to meet targets should never be a drawback to monitoring.

Monitoring can be achieved at two levels:

a) Indicators to monitor the **intended results** (e.g. 10% increase of the green density per capita)

b) Indicators to monitor the **outputs of the actions** decided by decision makers to reach the intended results (construction of one metropolitan park, accessible to all)

Module 4 provides a detailed overview of the terminology related to creating a results framework. In this Module, we focus mainly on intended results indicators that are linked to the SDGs framework.

Photo by Nerea Martí Sesarino on Unsplash

Intended results and outputs

Indicators to monitor intended results
RESULT INDICATORS

Intended results are linked to strategic objectives addressing sustainable development, such as those expressed in the 169 SDG targets.

Therefore, a **result indicator** is the strategic target pursued *(e.g. increase by 10%)* by the strategic objective *(increase green density)*.

Setting it requires a good ”reality check” of the current situation, in other words, of the **baseline value**.

Baseline value: 8% green density
Target: 8,8% in 2030

Can we achieve this? Define the means, how to achieve it. This is the call to action.

Indicators to monitor actions
OUTPUT INDICATORS

Output is ‘’what money buys’’, what comes out of an action.

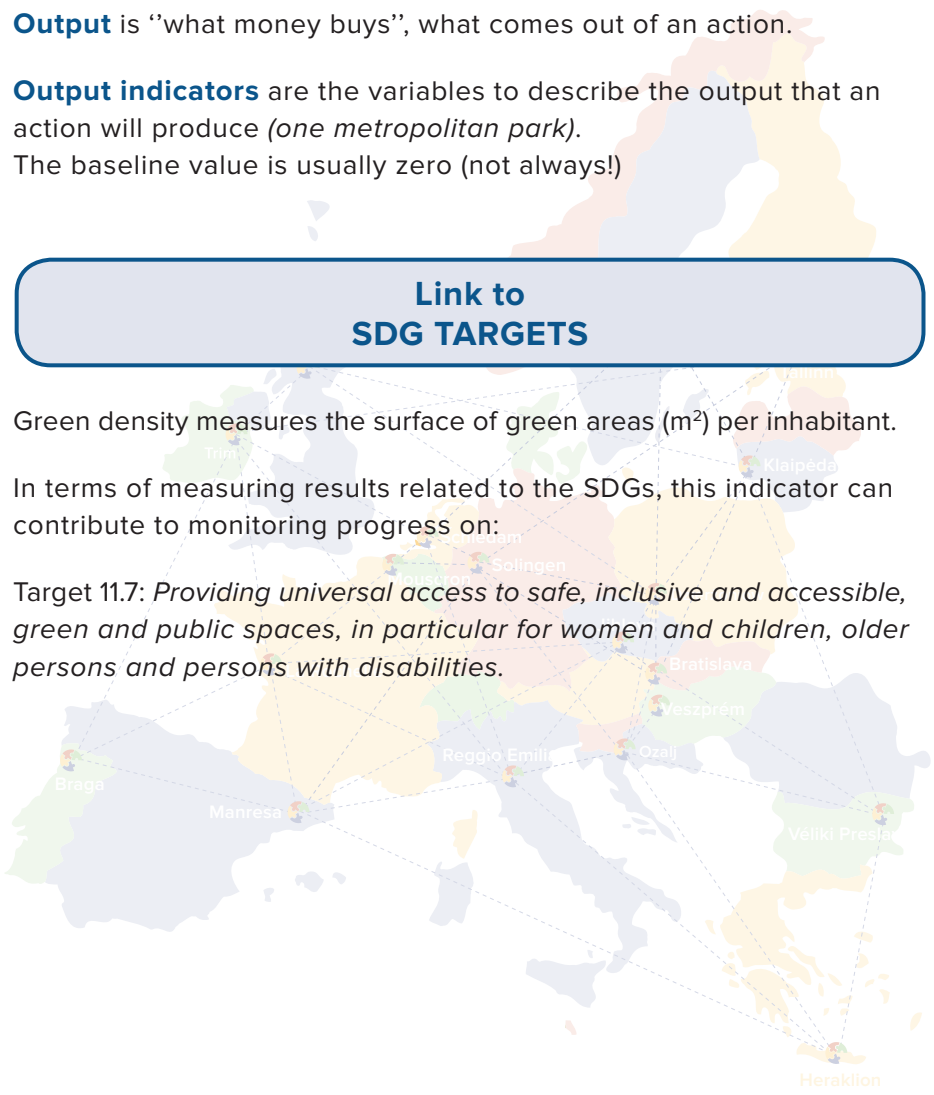
Output indicators are the variables to describe the output that an action will produce *(one metropolitan park)*.
The baseline value is usually zero (not always!)

Link to
SDG TARGETS

Green density measures the surface of green areas (m^2) per inhabitant.

In terms of measuring results related to the SDGs, this indicator can contribute to monitoring progress on:

Target 11.7: *Providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.*

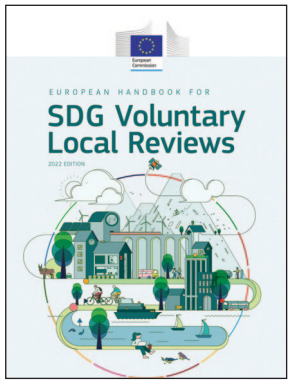


Learning from existing SDG indicator frameworks for cities

The “Fixing Indicators” phase of the GG4C network used the following indicators frameworks as inspiration and guidance for identifying relevant results to be monitored in the partners’ action plans and monitoring frameworks.

RFSC online tool. Based on European principles for sustainable and integrated urban development, the tool offers different frameworks to support the vision of integrated, sustainable urban development. The tool includes a set of indicators, which have been selected over the course of the development of the tool, and subsequently matched to the SDGs.

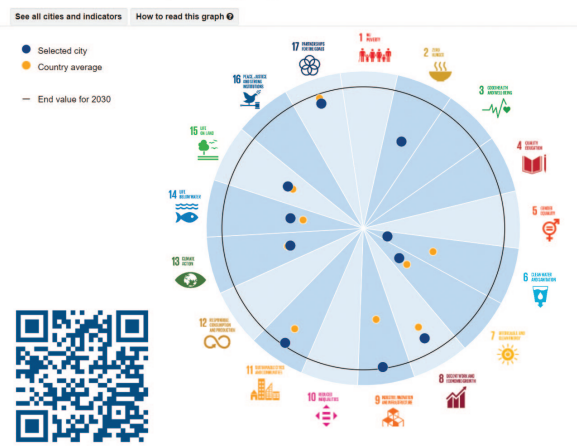
The Joint Research Centre’s European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews (Vol 1 and 2). Propose indicators across all SDGs, including those that can be calculated based on existing data sources, and more experimental ones.



ICARUS is a set of 33 indicators that characterize urban sustainability and provide managerial insights towards strategic design by prioritizing strategic measures according to indicators' results and to citizens’ perception.

% deviation of the value (x) from the minimum objective	Credits	Ranking	Characterization
If % deviation of (x) > 25%	10.00-7.5	Exceptional	
If 5% < % deviation of (x) < 25%	7.49-5.01	Good	
If deviation of (x) = minimum objective	5.00	Sufficient	
If -5 % < % deviation of (x) < -25%	4.99-2.50	Low	
If % deviation of (x) > -25%	2.49-0	Very insufficient	

The OECD programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs has developed an online tool called “Measuring the distance to the SDGs in regions and cities”. This tool provides more than 100 indicators relevant for SDGs available at the scale of regions or cities (over 250 000 inhabitants).



The ISO 37120 standard for cities and communities.
The World Council on City Data has mapped the ISO 37120 standard to the SDGs, providing a range of useful indicators.

The GG4C indicators pool: a starting point for SDG monitoring in cities

Through the GG4C network, a relevant and feasible set of indicators for monitoring SDGs in cities and the mechanism to monitor their achievement, through target setting and calculation formulas, were explored.

The exploration took place through transnational exchange between the 19 cities and between the cities and experts / expert organisations.

The journey led to defining a pool of indicators for SDG monitoring at the local level. This core set of indicators can be used as a starting point for SDG monitoring in cities, and be complemented by additional indicators from existing frameworks.

The GG4C indicator pool

Analytic report that lead to the pool

Overview of the methodology

For compiling of the pool of indicators that can be used by any city to monitor urban sustainable development, the following steps have been followed:

1. Investigation of indicators used by the 19 city partners to the GG4C Network during the Diagnosis phase of the network.
2. Investigation of indicators included in well established sustainable development data sets developed for Cities taking into consideration also the 169 targets of the UN Sustainable Development Framework.
3. Mapping of their correspondence to SDGs.
4. Identification of gaps in SDG coverage.
5. Review of the literature to fill those gaps.
6. Constitution of the pool of indicators.

Photo credit: GG4C partner city Braga during the network's 8th transnational meeting

The GG4C indicators pool: sample SDG 11 indicators

The following table shows some sample indicators from the GG4C Indicator Pool related to SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. The pool shows the official global UN indicators for SDG 11 (by target) next to the ones proposed for cities, drawing on the indicators frameworks and methodology introduced in this module.

The source of the indicators (i.e. which dataset they come from) is also indicated.

The full GG4C indicator pool

Photo credit: GG4C partner city Braga, during the network's 8th transnational meeting

SDG Target	UN Indicator	Proposed indicator	Source
11.1	11.1.1 Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing	% of population satisfied with affordability of housing	OECD, RFSC
11.2	11.2.1 Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	% of population that live near a basic service center (including public transport service)	ICARUS, JRC, RFSC
11.3	11.3.1 Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate	Population density (per km^2) Built up area (m^2/capita)	ICARUS, ISO, RFSC JRC
11.6	11.6.1 Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed in controlled facilities out of total municipal waste generated, by cities	% solid urban waste diverted from landfill Total collected municipal solid waste per capita	ICARUS ISO, RFSC

Module 5: Monitoring and reporting

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)

As mentioned in the introduction of this Module, VLRs are reports produced at sub-national level showcasing results relevant to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

There is no standard format or approach to VLRs, which started as a bottom-up innovation led by cities to complement national reviews. As a practice growing over time, VLRs have come to represent more than a mere statistical exercise, but is rather a way to enhance local policies for sustainable development and their implementation. In Espoo (Finland), for example, the VLR was a starting point for engaging local stakeholders and raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda. Similarly, in Bristol (UK), the VLR helped to develop its One City Approach to their strategy for sustainable development.

Globally, around 125 VLRs have been produced so far. It is an approximate number since monitoring not as systematic as at the national level. 35% of the VLRs are from Europe (see the map to the right).

Online library of published VLRs hosted by the UN

To support the production of VLRs, various guiding documents exist. In Europe, the JRC Handbook on SDG Voluntary Local Reviews – so far produced in two volumes – help cities to identify relevant data and approaches to report their SDG progress.

In the latest edition from 2022, 72 indicators have been included covering 54 of the 169 SDG targets.

JRC Handbook on European VLRs

Overview of VLRs produced in Europe

Europe	44
Northern Europe	18
Denmark	1
Finlad	4
Norway	4
Sweden	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	4
Southern Europe	14
Albania	1
Greece	1
Italy	1
Portugal	1
Spain	10
Western Europe	12
Belgium	2
France	6
Germany	4

Source: JRC Handbook on Voluntary Local Reviews, 2022 edition

SDG monitoring in Reggio Emilia's Single Policy Document

Reggio Emilia (Italy) has integrated the SDGs into its Single Policy Document, which guides the holistic development of the city. The document has six strategic guidelines, 23 objectives and 48 actions that draw on the political priorities of the mayor's mandate period.

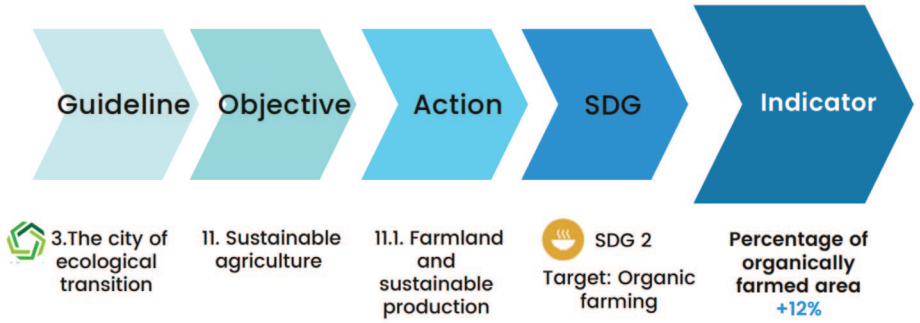
In the document, indicators are selected by the Municipal services on the basis of:

- SDGs and their targets
- Official sources (ISTAT – National Institute of Statistics and ASVIS – the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development)

One of the challenges with aligning the SDGs and the Single Policy Document has been to find indicators that reflect results showing the impact of actions, rather than outputs that measure operational targets.

The example below shows the process of identifying indicators for the Single Policy Document, aligned with SDG targets. The SDG targets help to define the desired results.

This is an example of a new indicator that is being tested in relation to the city's new food policy.



This indicator can contribute to monitor progress on SDG target 2.4:

By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.

Strengthening Klaipėda's strategic development plan through SDG indicators

In Klaipėda (Lithuania), comparing SDG targets and indicators to existing objectives and indicators in the Klaipėda City Municipality Strategic Development Plan 2021-2030 helped to identify elements in the strategy that could be strengthened.

More specifically, the proposed integration of SDG indicators covered sustainability aspects not previously addressed or not sufficiently addressed in the strategic plan. These included aspects of gender equality, reduction of inequalities, meeting the needs of different groups of society and inclusion, sustainable tourism, and preservation of natural ecosystems.

The example to the right shows how one of the strategic priorities of the city has been enhanced using the SDGs analysis, integrating additional SDG targets and indicators.

Objective 1.3 of Klaipėda's Strategic Development Plan 2021-2030	Key evaluation indicator
Develop professionals who meet the needs of the market in a continuously evolving way.	Average annual vacancy and unemployment ratio (%).

2030 principle to be strengthened:

- Leave no one behind.

Complementary SDG targets	Additional UN indicators	Proposed localised indicators
8.5. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and people with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value by 2030.	8.5.1. Average hourly earnings of staff by gender, age, occupation and disability status.	Monthly wage gap between women and men working in the municipality.
	8.5.2. Unemployment rate by sex, age and disability status.	Unemployment rate by sex.
8.6. By 2020, drastically reduce the share of young people not in employment, education or training.	8.6.1. Proportion of young people (aged 15-24) not in education and employment.	Out-of-school children of school age.

Using VLRs as a monitoring, reporting and governance tool in Tallinn and Jihlava

As a growing and important part of the practice of localising the SDGs, VLRs can be used as a monitoring tool for holistic city strategies aligned with the SDGs.

Making the production of a VLR a target to aim for can help to streamline a city's strategic planning, monitoring and reporting efforts. This is the case in GG4C partners Tallinn and Jihlava, who aim to make VLRs a feature of their SDG localisation journey.

The process of preparing a VLR can also help to strengthen multi-level governance, for example aligning the format and timing of reporting with national efforts to produce a Voluntary National Review (VNR), and can foster stronger collaboration with universities or other research institutes, as well as other local stakeholders.

Photo credit: GG4C lead partner city Tallinn

In Jihlava, the VLR will enable an assessment of Jihlava's progress in meeting the SDGs, as well as the internal assessment and evaluation of the implementation of the city's development strategy. Other actors in the city from the private, non-profit and public sectors and the city's residents should also participate in the VLR process. The production of the VLR will be done by the authority itself or outsourced, for example in collaboration with a university.

Tallinn's first VLR will be prepared in 2026 as part of the annual "Tallinn 2035" strategy monitoring report, and under the leadership of the Strategic Management Office. Cooperation will be sought with the Estonian national government (producing the national VNR) and the city's most important partners. It will map, among other things, the flagship projects carried out by those partners that have supported the SDGs in the evaluation period (starting from 2015) and which future projects will support the implementation of the SDGs. Tallinn's VLR will be approved by the Tallinn City Council, after which it will be submitted to the United Nations.

Photo credit: Attila Domjan, during the network's 9th transnational meeting in Veszprém, November 2022.

Photo credit: URBACT, during the URBACT Festival in Pantin, Greater Paris area, June 2022.

Acknowledgements and Credits for Module 5

The content of this Module has been based on the "Fixing Indicators" phase of the Global Goals for Cities (GG4C) Network journey, towards the localisation of SDGs. The key author is Dr. Eleni Feleki, URBACT Ad Hoc expert of the GG4C network and senior advisor on urban transformations, with the support of the network's Lead Expert Stina Heikkila and based on the work of 19 partner cities in the frame of their baseline city profiles.

This Module exploits scientific research on indicators for urban sustainability and tools developed by the OECD (local framework for SDGs), ISO 37120 (Indicators for Sustainable Cities), the JRC (European Handbook on Voluntary Local Reviews), the CEMR (Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, RFSC online tool) and by Dr. Eleni Feleki herself, (ICARUS framework of indicators for characterisation of urban sustainability). Mentioned datasets have been aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals dataset.

- See: Feleki E., Vlachokostas Ch., Moussiopoulos N., (2020). Holistic methodological framework for the characterization of urban sustainability and strategic planning, Journal of Cleaner Production 243, 118432. (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.118432).

The section on Voluntary Local Reviews has benefitted from inputs from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and their contribution to the network's eighth transnational meeting in Braga, Portugal, September 2022. In particular, Dr. Iraklis Stamos contributed with a presentation of the JRC support and Handbook on SDG Voluntary Local Reviews that has served as a basis for the section.

Link: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC129381

Other examples come from GG4C partners' work. See Acknowledgements and Credits in Module 0 for a list of names by city.

Module 5: Monitoring and reporting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